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THE
PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT;
IN A
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN
A SCHOLAR AND A PEASANT.
WRITTEN BY
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SOCIETY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

A SHORT defence hath been thought necessary against a violent and groundless attack upon the Flintshire Committee, for having testified their approbation of the following Dialogue, which hath been publicly branded with the most injurious epithets; and it is conceived, that the sure way to vindicate this little tract from so unjust a character, will be as publicly to produce it.—The friends of the Revolution will instantly see, that it contains no principle which has not the support of the highest authority, as well as the clearest reason.

If the doctrines, which it slightly touches in a manner suited to the nature of the Dialogue, be “seditious, treasonable, and “diabolical,” Lord SOMERS was an incendiary, LOCKE a traitor, and the Convention-Parliament a Pandæmonium; but if those names are the glory and boast of England; and if that Convention secured our liberty and happiness, then the doctrines in question are not only just and rational, but constitutional and salutary; and the reproachful epithets belong wholly to the system of those, who so grossly misapplied them.

PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT;

DIALOGUE between a *Scholar* and a *Peasant*.

P. WHY should humble men, like me, sign or set marks to petitions of this nature? It is better for us peasants to mind our husbandry, and leave what we cannot comprehend to the King and Parliament.

S. You can comprehend more than you imagine; and, as a *free member of a free state*, have higher things to mind than you may conceive.

P. If by *free* you mean *out of prison*, I hope to continue so, as long as I can pay my rent to the 'squire's bailiff; but what is meant by a *free state*?

S. Tell me first what is meant by a club in a village, of which I know you to be a member.

P. It is an assembly of men, who meet after work every Saturday to be merry and happy for a few hours in the week.

S. Have you no other object but mirth?

P. Yes; we have a box, into which we contribute equally from our monthly or weekly savings, and out of which any members of the club are to be relieved in sickness or poverty; for the parish officers are so cruel and insolent, that it were better to starve than apply to them for relief.

S. Did they, or the 'squire, or the parson, or all together, compel you to form this society?

P. Oh! no—we could not be compelled; we formed it by our own choice.

S. You did right—But have you not some head or president of your club?

P. The master for each night is chosen by all the company present the week before.

S. Does he make laws to bind you in case of ill temper or misbehaviour?

P. He

P. He make laws! He bind us! No; we have all agreed to a set of equal rules, which are signed by every new comer, and were written in a strange hand by young *Spelman*, the lawyer's clerk, whose uncle is a member.

S. What should you do, if any one member were to insist on becoming *perpetual* master, and on altering your rules at his arbitrary will and pleasure?

P. We should expel him.

S. What if he were to bring a serjeant's guard, when the militia are quartered in your neighbourhood, and insist upon your obeying him?

P. We should resist, if we could; if not, the Society would be broken up.

S. Suppose that, with his serjeant's guard, he were to take the money out of the box or out of your pockets?

P. Would not that be a robbery?

S. I am seeking information from you. How should you act on such an occasion?

P. We should submit, perhaps, at the time; but should afterwards try to apprehend the robbers.

S. What if you could not apprehend them?

P. We might kill them, I should think; and, if the King would not pardon us, God would.

S. How could you either apprehend them, or, if they resisted, kill them, without a sufficient force in your own hands?

P. Oh! we are all good players at single stick, and each of us has a stout cudgel or quarter-staff in the corner of his room.

S. Suppose, that a few of the club were to domineer over the rest, and insist upon making laws for them—

P. We must take the same course; except that it would be easier to restrain one man, than a number: but we should be the majority with justice on our side.

S. A word or two on another head. Some of you, I presume, are no great accountants.

P. Few of us understand accounts; but we trust old *Lilly* the school-master, whom we believe to be an honest man; and he keeps the key of our box.

S. If your money should in time amount to a large sum, it might not perhaps be safe, to keep it at his house, or in any private house.

P. Where else should we keep it?

S. You

S. You might chuse to put it into the funds, or to lend it the 'squire, who has lost so much lately at *Newmarket*, taking his bond or some of his fields as your security for the pay-with interest.

P. We must in that case confide in young *Spelman*, who will soon set up for himself; and, if a lawyer can be honest, will be an honest lawyer.

S. What power do you give to *Lilly*, or should you give to *Spelman*, in the case supposed?

P. No power. We should give them both a due allowance for their trouble, and should expect a faithful account of all they had done for us.

S. Honest men may change their nature. What if both or either of them were to deceive you?

P. We should remove them, put our trust in better men, and try to repair our loss.

S. Did it never occur to you, that every state or nation was only a great *club*?

P. Nothing ever occurred to me on the subject; for I never thought about it.

S. Though you never thought before on the subject, yet you may be able to tell me, why you suppose men to have assembled, and to have formed *nations*, *communities*, or *states*, which all mean the same thing?

P. In order, I should imagine, to be as happy as they can, while they live.

S. By *happy* do you mean *merry* only?

P. To be as merry as they can without hurting themselves or their neighbours, but chiefly to secure themselves from danger, and to relieve their wants.

S. Do you believe, that any King or Emperor compelled them so to associate?

P. How could one man compel a multitude? A King or an Emperor, I presume is not born with an hundred hands.

S. When a prince of the blood shall in any country be so distinguished by nature, I shall then, and then only, conceive him to be a greater man than you. But might not an army, with a King or General at their head, have compelled them to assemble?

P. Yes; but the army must have been formed by their own choice. One man or a few can never govern many without their consent.

S. Suppose,

S. Suppose, however, that a multitude of men, assembled in a town or city, were to chuse a King or Governor, might they not give him power or authority ?

P. To be sure ; but they would never be so mad, I hope, as to give him a power of making their *laws*.

S. Who else should make them ?

P. The *whole* nation or people.

S. What if they disagreed ?

P. The opinion of the *greater number*, as in our village-clubs, must be taken and prevail.

S. What could be done, if the society were so large, that all could not meet in the same place ?

P. A greater number must chuse a less.

S. Who should be the chusers ?

P. All, who are not *upon the parish*. In our club, if a man asks relief of the overseer, he ceases to be one of us ; because he must depend on the overseer.

S. Could not a few men, one in seven for instance, chuse the assembly of law-makers as well as a larger number ?

P. As conveniently, perhaps ; but I would not suffer any man to chuse another, who was to make laws, by which my money or my life might be taken from me.

S. Have you a *freehold* in any county of forty shillings a year ?

P. I have nothing in the world but my cattle, implements of husbandry, and household goods, together with my farm, for which I pay a fixed rent to the squire.

S. Have you a vote then in any city or borough ?

P. I have no vote at all ; but am able by my honest labour to support my wife and four children ; and, whilst I act honestly, I may defy the laws.

S. Can you be ignorant, that the Parliament, to which members are sent by this county, and by the next market-town, have power to make new laws, by which you and your family may be stripped of your goods, thrown into prison, and even deprived of life ?

P. A dreadful power ! I never made inquiries, having business of my own, concerning the business of Parliament ; but imagined, that the laws had been fixed for many hundred years.

S. The common laws, to which you refer, are equal, just, and humane ; but the King and Parliament may alter them when they please.

P. The

P. The King ought therefore to be a good man, and the Parliament to consist of men equally good.

S. The King alone can do no harm; but who must judge the goodness of Parliament-men?

P. All those whose property, freedom, and lives may be affected by their laws.

S. Yet six men in seven, who inhabit this kingdom, have, like you, no votes; and the petition, which I desired you to sign, has nothing for its object, but the restoration of you all to the right of chusing those law makers, by whom your money or your lives may be taken from you. Attend, while I read it distinctly.

P. Give me your pen—I never wrote my name, ill as it may be written, with greater eagerness.

S. I applaud you, and trust, that your example will be followed by millions. Another word before we part. Recollect your opinion about your club in the village, and tell what ought to be the consequence, if the King alone were to insist on making laws, or in altering them at his will and pleasure.

P. He too must be expelled.

S. Oh! but think of his standing army, and of the militia, which now are his in substance, though ours in form.

P. If he were to employ that force against the nation, they would and ought to resist him, or the state would cease to be a state.

S. What, if the great accountants and great lawyers, the *Lillys* and *Spelmans*, of the nation were to abuse their trust, and cruelly injure, instead of faithfully serving, the public?

P. We must request the King to remove them, and make trial of others; but none should implicitly be trusted.

S. But what if a few great lords, or wealthy men, were to keep the King himself in subjection, yet exert his force, lavish his treasure, and misuse his name, so as to domineer over the people and manage the Parliament?

P. We must fight for the King and for ourselves.

S. You talk of fighting, as if you were speaking of some rustick engagement at a wake; but your quarter-staffs would avail you little against bayonets.

P. We might easily provide ourselves with better arms.

S. Not so easily: when the moment of resistance came, you would be deprived of all arms; and those who should furnish you with them, or exhort you to take them up, would be called traitors, and probably put to death.

P. We

P. We ought always, therefore, to be ready; and keep each of us a strong firelock in the corner of his bed-room.

S. That would be legal as well as rational. Are you, my honest friend, provided with a musket?

P. I will contribute no more to the club, and purchase a firelock with my savings.

S. It is not necessary—I have two, and will make you a present of one with complete accoutrements.

P. I accept it thankfully, and will converse with you at your leisure on other subjects of this kind.

S. In the mean while, spend an hour every morning for the next fortnight in learning to prime and load expeditiously, and to fire and charge with bayonet firmly and regularly. I say every morning; because, if you exercise *too late in the evening*, you may fall into some of the legal snares, which have been spread for you by those gentlemen, who would rather secure game for their table, than liberty for the nation.

P. Some of my neighbours, who have served in the militia, will readily teach me; and, perhaps, the whole village may be persuaded to procure arms, and to learn their exercise.

S. It cannot be expected, that villagers should purchase arms, but they might easily be supplied, if the gentry of the nation would spare a little from their vices and luxury.

P. May they return to some sense of honour and virtue!

S. Farewell, at present; and remember, “that a free state is only a more numerous and more powerful club, and that he only is a free man, who is member of such a state.”

P. Good morning, Sir! You have made me wiser and better than I was yesterday; and yet, methinks, I had some knowledge in my own mind of this great subject, and have been a politician all my life without perceiving it.

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